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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REPORT -- COVERAGE OF POTUS AF-PAK SPEECH IN INDIAN MEDIA -- Part II (continued)

SUMMARY: President Obama's speech on the way forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan received extensive coverage throughout India today. Indian media highlighted the continued commitment of the U.S. in Afghanistan and mentioned repeatedly that the GOI was "not complaining" at being left out of a specific mention in the President's speech. Ambassador Roemer's statement amplifying and localizing the message was widely quoted, with particular focus on his comment that India is a key U.S. partner in the region. Many Indian commentators speculated that the President's strategy was largely dictated by domestic political compulsions. They concurred with Indian officials and security analysts that the "cancer" of extremism originated in Pakistan, not Afghanistan. Editorials broadly showed an understanding -- even appreciation -- of the U.S. decision to first augment, then shrink U.S. troop levels, but there was palpable disappointment at the strategy's perceived silence on Pakistan. And while there was divergence of opinion on whether the President's new policy announcement will ultimately bear fruit, there was complete unanimity that declaring a withdrawal timeline to the enemy is a grave misjudgment. Indians expressed concern that the withdrawal of the U.S. from Afghanistan would encourage terror groups to play the waiting game. End summary

INDIA WELCOMES U.S. ANNOUNCEMENT

¶1. India said it was not "complaining" about not being mentioned in President Obama's speech. Instead, India welcomed Washington's continued commitment in Afghanistan, saying it was "very pleased" that pressure on al Qaeda and the Taliban would not be eased. Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor was widely reported saying, "India is not complaining at all. What you are overlooking is that our Prime Minister has just been there. He received a pretty thorough exposition of the US's views on the issue and President Obama called him up in Delhi yesterday to brief him further before his public speech."

¶2. THE TIMES OF INDIA said the speech was remarkable for its gloss over the fundamental fact that the extremist "cancer" originates in Pakistan, not Afghanistan. The paper quoted Indian officials and analysts saying Pakistan is the real problem, because both al Qaida and Taliban originate from and are nurtured there. The paper reported that President Obama's decision to send more troops to Afghanistan while at the same time announcing a deadline for their withdrawal has left the Indian security establishment racking their brains. While some feel that Obama needed to pander to his party and domestic constituency, others believe that the July 2011 deadline for troop withdrawal will encourage terror groups, including India-specific outfits like LeT and JeM, to play the waiting game.

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EDITORIALS IN THE ENGLISH PRESS

¶3. "THE ROAD AHEAD," editorial in centrist English daily, THE TIMES OF INDIA: "Obama has probably made the best of a bad situation. If Islamabad allows militants safe havens, all the American efforts will be wasted. New Delhi must not cavil if large amounts of civilian aid flow into Pakistan, since that would shore up anti-militancy forces. It must, on the contrary, stay closely engaged with Washington and with Kabul and keep reminding Washington and other international capitals of the urgency of the task of turning Afghanistan around, and itself remain ready to help."

¶4. "LIMITS OF THE AFGHAN SURGE," editorial in left-influenced English daily, THE HINDU: "By far the biggest weakness of the new Af-Pak policy is Mr. Obama's inability to craft an effective strategy to deal with the Pakistani side of the equation. In his speech on Tuesday, the U.S. president spoke of a cancer that has spread on both sides of the Durand Line. If he stopped short of identifying where the malignancy was worst, it was not for lack of information. Rather he hopes to cajole or even threaten Islamabad into taking action against the Taliban and other extremist groups which operate from its territory. The only problem is the 2011 exit date that Mr. Obama announced. Rawalpindi might well be tempted to instruct the Taliban to lie low till the appointed hour only to emerge triumphant once U.S. troops begin to leave."

¶5. "SURGE, EXIT," editorial in centrist English daily, THE INDIAN EXPRESS: "The world cannot object to Obama's choice -- to end America's costly war in Afghanistan. The exit strategy might encourage the Taliban and its mentors to simply sit it out. Many will be downright skeptical about the president's plans to entice Pakistan to confront America's enemies by offering it a solid strategic partnership. After all, some of America's enemies are among the best friends of the Pakistan army. For its part, Delhi should wish Obama well, because our interests are the same: oust Al Qaeda

from the subcontinent, prevent the extremists from returning to power in Kabul, persuade the Pakistan army to dissociate itself from all terrorist groups including the Lashkar-e-Toiba, and encourage Islamabad to build normal neighborly relations with Kabul and Delhi. At the same time Delhi must also prepare for potential US failure in Afghanistan and a reduced American commitment to Afghanistan from the middle of 2011."

¶6. "MR OBAMA GOES TO WAR," editorial in centrist English daily, THE HINDUSTAN TIMES: "Mr Obama's timeline is relatively open-ended, but this sop to the left-wing of his party ensures that the Taliban will continue to believe they need only wait. The only thing likely to change this mindset will be bullets and bodies."

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¶7. "HEADED FOR DISASTER: OBAMA'S NEW AFPAK POLICY WON'T WORK," editorial in right-of-center, pro-BJP English daily, THE PIONEER: "Given Mr. Obama's dithering and his by now established inability to grasp the dynamics of the South Asian region, there really is nothing surprising about his 'new' initiative. If at all there is something that merits attention is his attempt to lay the blame at Afghanistan's door while absolving Pakistan -- he has lashed out at the victim of Islamabad-sponsored terrorism while praising the criminal state of Pakistan."

¶8. "US POLICY WILL DISTRACT INDIA," op-ed by diplomatic editor Shobori Ganguli in right-of-center, pro-BJP English daily, THE PIONEER: "After the Americans exit the region and if China emerges as the Asian moderator, it will use every trick in the trade to needle India, all in the name of 'encouraging' peace and stability in Asia."

¶9. "OBAMA COMPOUNDS FOLLY," op-ed in right-of-center, pro-BJP English daily, THE PIONEER: "The new Af-Pak policy reflects Barack Obama's inability to grasp a simple fact: The US cannot hope to defeat jihadi terrorism by pampering Pakistan which sponsors jihad. Like AfPak-1, the new policy is bound to fail, despite his promise of bringing the war to a 'successful conclusion.' Obama's AfPak Policy-2...is marked by critical words for the Government of Afghanistan and soft words for the rulers of Pakistan - as if evils such as corruption, poor governance, narcotics production and lack of accountability are confined only to Afghanistan and one does not find these evils in Pakistan.... Seeking partnership with a state perpetrator of terrorism is not the way of ending it. That is what Mr. Obama has done in his address."

¶10. "PAK FIRST AND ONLY THEN AFGHANISTAN," op-ed by strategic editor Manoj Joshi in centrist English daily, MAIL TODAY: "India needs to focus sharply on the source of our greatest danger -- Pakistan. New Delhi needs to ensure that any new Afghan initiative is carefully calibrated to deliver positive outcomes in Pakistan. New Delhi must be a part of the Afghan solution and a major player in the Afghan game. It must play to win."

¶11. "THE SPEECH WITHIN THE SPEECH," op-ed in centrist English daily, THE INDIAN EXPRESS: "Obama strategy appears to be to promise Pakistan long term partnership, at the same time compel it to act against all terrorist groups and build an Afghan army which will be able to defend Afghanistan against the Taliban. Though the speech at West Point appears soft on Pakistan, it is clear that the focus of the strategy is raising the Afghan force to enable responsible

transition of US forces out of Afghanistan, warning on Pakistan's ambiguous relationship with terrorist organizations, and outlining the continuing threat to the US homeland. The Obama strategy is a challenge to

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the Pakistani Army and its Inter-Services Intelligence."

¶12. "AFGHANISTAN IS NOW OBAMA'S WAR," op-ed in centrist English daily, BUSINESS STANDARD: "Obama's plan could provide an equal satisfaction to the Taliban, who now know exactly when their enemy plans to leave. Is Obama being too optimistic in saying that Pakistani public opinion had turned against extremism and that Islamabad was now genuinely on the side of America?"

¶13. "AFGHAN: INDIA IN NEED OF A RETHINK," editorial in December 3, 2009 independent English daily, DECCAN CHRONICLE: "More than any other country, and longer than any, India has known the meaning of Pakistan-nurtured terrorism, and the geography is not about to change. The Taliban and Pakistan's ISI are likely to be heartened with the Obama announcement, although no timetable has been laid down."

¶14. "NOT QUITE NEW," editorial in centrist Kolkata English daily, THE TELEGRAPH: "Why Mr. Obama commits himself to a time frame is obvious. With 55 per cent of the domestic population and a sizeable section within his own party having turned against the Afghanistan war, the initiation of the countdown had become a necessary rider to an announcement of a troop surge, without which Mr. Obama runs the chance of losing whatever has been gained in eight years of fighting. With the pious announcement of withdrawal, without the groundwork complete, Mr. Obama may be giving time to his adversaries in Afghanistan to work out their plot. Meanwhile, he may be losing his own."

EDITORIALS IN THE VERNACULAR PRESS

¶15. "OBAMA GOES FOR OSAMA," editorial in December 3 AMAR UJALA Hindi daily: "Obama has realized and admitted that the Af-Pak region is the epicenter of international terror. That's what India has been saying all along! In that sense, there is an Indian stamp on his newly announced policy. While the Af-Pak strategy looks fine, from India's standpoint America is erring in its high reliance on Pakistan. Of course it is a compulsion for the U.S. to go with Pakistan, but America needs to understand that Pakistan is where the terrorism stems from!"

¶16. "AMERICAN DUPLICITY," editorial in December 3 AMAR UJALA Hindi daily: "There is nothing new in President Obama's Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy. It is another duplicitous U.S. attempt to placate its supporters by announcing 30,000 more troops, and pacify those domestic constituents who want a pullout of U.S. forces. How does Obama hope to end the Afghan war in 18 months, when the last eight years have only seen the strengthening of the Taliban and the failure of the western forces? Obama's Afghan plans do not seem likely to work out by 2011."

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¶17. "OBAMA'S AFGHAN POLICY," editorial in December 3, 2009 Urdu daily, THE SIASAT DAILY: "President Obama's new policy for Afghanistan seems to be weak toward Taliban. The truth is that America is not prepared to

accept its defeat against Taliban."

¶18. "OBAMA COMES DOWN HEAVILY ON PAKISTAN WHILE DECLARING THE AF-PAK POLICY," editorial in left-of-center Marathi daily, APLA MAHANAGAR: "Not mincing any words, U.S. President Barack Obama has confirmed that Pakistan is a confirmed breeding ground of extremism and sectarianism of every hue. Thankfully he has used strong words asking Pakistan to act against Jihadi outfits that threaten America and its allies from their bases in Pakistan. This gesture is welcome."

¶19. "WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS," editorial in centrist Marathi daily, PRAHAR: "President Obama is fearful of angered reactions from the American people. Americans have failed to appreciate the necessity of U.S. presence in Afghanistan. The timetable for withdrawal is specifically directed at Americans who are fiercely against aggression in Afghanistan."

¶20. "MORE FORCES TO AFGHANISTAN," editorial in December 03, Bangalore-based, left-of-center Kannada daily PRAJAVANI: "After announcing Afghan policy, U.S. President Obama spoke to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and India should not take this telecon casually. India just wants to put an end to Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. It would be suicidal if India gets into the Afghan muddle created by America. Now, India should take cautious steps, in wake of changed U.S. policy towards Afghanistan."
ROEMER